A Rollicking Skit on the Margot Asquith Memoirs

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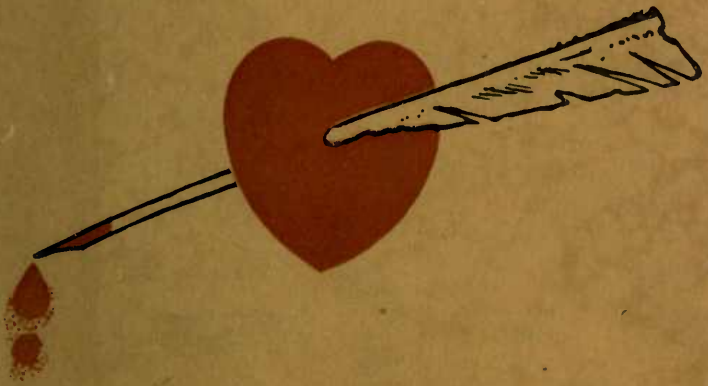
MARGE ASKINFORIT



BY

BARRY PAIN

DUFFIELD & COMPANY

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ual care in order to give due weight t
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t the decision of the judges will be ready
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gle which will be deeply interesting, not
y in educational circles but in the realms
practical life.

the Arts

e study of plant life by learned societies,
e influence exerted by the Missouri Bo-
nical Gardens is so far reaching that their
me and fame has spread to all parts of
e world. Henry Shaw, of Scotch birth,
ade a comfortable fortune in business in
Louis and gave his country estate, then
the outskirts of the city, for a garden
the cultivation of exotic plants. The
nds which he left have been used in many
ys for the stimulation of the study of
nt life, and some of the most important
periments affecting agriculture and horti-
ture have been made there.

n the realm of pure science, the Barnard
dal, which is bestowed by Columbia Uni-
rsity, of which the donor was once presi-
nt, has stimulated discovery in physical
d astronomical fields. It has been be-
wed every five years since 1889, and those
o have discovered something which repre-
its a "novel application of science to the
fare of the race" have the first call.

Columbia University also manages funds
ven to it by Joseph F. Loubat from the
come of which prizes of $1,000 and $400
ch are conferred for the best works re-
ing to the geography, history, ethnology
d archæology of

Irene Dwen Andrews

May 1921

"MARGE ASKINFORIT." By BARRY PAIN. Duffield.

Mr. Pain's method of satirizing a certain familiar diary is to lay the scene in a much lower stratum of society. The imaginary author of this new autobiography is a parlor maid, who keeps Margot Asquith before her constantly as a Great Example. Her story is amusing, but she sticks to her G. E. a little too closely; one feels somehow that it could have been done better. The humor is usually an exaggerated form of under-statement. The following passage is a very fair example:

I was by far the most spiritual of the family. But my brother Minoru attended chapel regularly, until they stopped collecting the offertory in open plates and substituted locked boxes with a slot in them. He found another chapel that seemed more promising, but he attended it only once. I shall always consider that the policeman was needlessly rough with him, for Minoru said distinctly that he would go quietly.

MARGE ASKINFORIT

BY

BARRY PAIN

NEW YORK
DUFFIELD AND COMPANY
1921

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" And every week you opened your hoard
Of truthful and tasteful tales—
How you sat on the knees of the Laureate
Lord,
How you danced with the Prince of
Wales—
And we knew that the Sunday Times had
scored
In Literature and Sales."

To Margot in Heaven.

By Clarence G. Hennessy (circa 1985).

Author's Note

This book was suggested by the reading of some extracts from the autobiography of a brilliant lady who had much to tell us about a number of interesting people. There was a quality in that autobiography which seemed to demand parody, and no doubt the autobiographer who cannot wait for posterity and perspective will pardon a little contemporary distortion.

In adding my humble wreath to the flatteries—in their sincerest form—which she has already received, I should like to point out that a parody of an autobiography should not be a caricature of the people biographed—some of whom must already have suffered enough. I have lowered the social key of the original considerably, not only to bring it within the compass of the executant, but also to make a distinction. I have increased the remoteness from real life—which was sometimes appreciable in the original—to such an extent that it should be impossible to suppose that any of the grotesques of the parody is intended for anybody in real life. Nobody in the parody is intended to be a representation, or even a misrepresentation, of any real person living or dead. For instance, In-

memorison is not intended to be a caricature of Tennyson, but the passage which deals with him is intended to parody some of the stuff that has been written about Tennyson.

No doubt the author of the original has opened to the public several doors through which it is not thinkable that a parodist would care to follow her. Apart from that, parody should be brief, just as autobiography should be long—*ars brevis, vita longa.*

BARRY PAIN.

October 8, 1920.

*** *The quotations are from the articles which appeared in "The Sunday Times." It does not of course follow that these passages will appear in the same form, or will appear at all, when the complete autobiography is published.*

MARGE ASKINFORIT

First Extract

THE CATASTROPHIC FAMILY

I was christened Margarine, of course, but in my own circle I have always been known as Marge. The name is, I am informed, derived from the Latin word *margo*, meaning the limit. I have always tried to live right up to it.

We were a very numerous family, and I can find space for biographical details of only a few of the more important. I must keep room for myself.

My elder sister, Casein—Casey, as we always called her—was supposed to be the most like myself, and was less bucked about it than one would have expected. I never made any mistake myself as to which was which. I had not her beautiful lustrous eyes, but neither had she my wonderful cheek. She had not my intelligence. Nor had she my priceless gift for uttering an unimportant personal opinion as if it were the final verdict of posterity with the black cap on. We were devoted to one another, and many a time have I owed my position as temporary parlour-

maid in an unsuspicious family to the excellent character that she had written for me.

She married Moses Morgenstein, a naturalized British subject, who showed his love for his adopted country by trading as Stanley Harcourt. He was a striking figure with his coal-black hair and nails, his drooping eyelashes and under-lip, and the downward sweep of his ingratiating nose. The war found him burning with enthusiasm, and I give here one verse of a fine poem which he wrote and, as I will remember, recited in Mrs. Mopworth's *salon* :

I vos in Luntun since t'ree year,
In dis lant I holt so tear,
Inklant, my Inklant !
Mit her overbowering might
If she gonquer in der fight,
M. Morgenstein vill be all right—
Nicht ?—
Inklant, my own !

He was a man of diverse talents, and I used to regret that he gave to the tripe-dressing what was meant for the muses. Alas, he was, though indirectly, one of the many victims of the Great War. His scheme for the concealment of excess profits was elaborate and ingenious, and practised with assiduity. His simple mind could not apprehend that elemental honesty was in process of modification. "Vot I maig for myself, dat I keeb, *nicht ?*" he often said to me. And then the blow fell.

However, he has earned the utmost remission to which good conduct could entitle him, and we are hoping that he will be out again by Christmas.

My next sister, Saccharine, was of a filmy and prismatic beauty that was sufficient evidence of her Cohltar origin—our mother, of course, was a Cohltar. I never thought her mind the equal of my own. Indeed, at the moment of going to press I have not yet met the mind that I thought the equal of my own. But about her beauty there was no doubt. In those days—I am speaking of the 'nineties—it was quite an ordinary event for my sister, inadvertently, to hold up an omnibus. The horses pulled up as soon as they saw her, and refused to move until they had drunk their fill of her astounding beauty. I well remember one occasion on which the horses in a West Kensington omnibus met her at Piccadilly Circus and refused to leave her until she reached Highgate, in spite of the whip of the driver, the blasphemy of the conductor, the more formal complaints of the passengers, and direct police intervention.

She was a sweet girl in those days, and I loved her. I never had any feelings of jealousy. How can one who is definitely assured of superiority to everybody be jealous of anybody?

She married a Russian, Alexis Chopitoff. He was a perfect artist in his own medium, which happened to be hair. It is to him that I owe what is my only beauty, and I am assured

that it defies detection. At one time life's greatest prizes seemed to be within his reach. During the war his skill in rendering the *chevelure* of noted pianists fit for military service attracted official attention, and if he had been made O.B.E. it would have come as no surprise to any of us. Unhappily his interest in the political affairs of his own country led him to annex at Waterloo a despatch-case which, pedantically speaking, did not belong to him. The case unfortunately happened to contain a diamond tiara, and this led to misunderstandings. Nothing could have exceeded the courage of dear Saccharine when she learned that at the end of his sentence he was to be deported.

"It will leave me," she said, with perfect calm and in words that have since become historical, "in a position of greater freedom and less responsibility."

But I knew how near she was to a nervous breakdown. Indeed, nervous breakdown was her successful defence when, a week later, she was arrested at Whiteridge's with a tin of sardines, two cakes of super-cream toilet-soap, and a bound copy of Keble's "Christian Year" in her muff. The malice and animosity that Whiteridge's showed in the prosecution are but partly excused by the fact that dear Saccharine had pinched the muff first.

Another sister, Chlorine, in later years became well known as a medium. She communicated with the hereafter, or at the very least professed to do so, by telephonic wire-

less. It used to be rather weird to hear her ring up "Gehenna, 1 double 7, 6." I have not the least doubt that she would have convinced a famous physicist who, curiously enough, is weak on facts, or a writer of detective stories who, equally curiously, is weak on imagination. I am sorry to say that she would never give me the winner of the next Derby, nor do I remember that she ever used this special and exclusive information for her own benefit. But, like other mediums, she could always give a plausible reason for avoiding any test that was really a test; and now that she has doubled her fees owing to the increased cost of labour and materials, she ought to do very well, particularly after the friendly boost that I have just given her.

Then there was Methyll—this is the old Anglo-Saxon form of Ethel. She was a charming child and made a profound study of natural history. I remember her saying to me at a reception where the refreshments had been somewhat restricted: "One cocktail doesn't make a swallow." Modern biology has, I believe, confirmed this observation. She spent much of her time at the Zoo, and it was thought that it would be an advantage if she could be permanently resident there. But although she was not unlike a flamingo in the face, and I had some interest with the man who supplies the fish for the sea-lions, no vacant cage could be found. An offer to let her share one with the cassowary—*missionara timbuctana*—was refused.

I must now speak of another sister, Caramel, though I do so with grief. However, there is a skeleton in every fold—I mean to say, a black sheep in every cupboard. She was undeniably beautiful, and had a romantic postcard face. Her figure was perfect. Her intelligence was C 3. In a week moment she accepted a thinking part in a revue at the "Frivolity," and her career ended, as might have been expected, in a shocking *mésalliance*. She married the Marquis of Beanstrite, and has more than once appeared on the back page of the "Daily Mail," but that is not everything. She never sees anything of me now, and it brings the tears to my eyes when I think what she is missing.

My brothers were all of them sportsmen, but they were seldom at home. They seemed to feel that they were wanted elsewhere, and they generally were. You ask any policeman in the Kentish Town district, mentioning my name, and he will tell you.

There were seventy-three of us all together, of whom eighty-four survive, including myself. And yet dear papa sometimes seems a little irritable—I wonder why.

My mamma was quite different from my papa. They were not even of the same sex. But that so often happens, don't you think?

My father had a curious fancy for naming all his sons after subsequent winners of the Derby. No doubt it will be said that this is not always practical; nor is it—the Derby is occasionally won by a gee-gee of the sex

which I have myself adopted, and in those cases the name is unsuitable for a boy. But if it could be generally done, it would absolutely preclude any betting on one of our classic races; it would probably also preclude the race. After all, we do have to be moral in the intervals, and reclaim factory-girls in the dinner-hour. But I fear it will never happen—so few men have dear papa's wonderful foresight.

Spearmint, my eldest surviving brother, came much under the influence of Alexis Chopitoff, and entered the same profession. Simple and unassuming, no one would have supposed that in one year he had backed the winner in all the principal races. But such was veritably the case.

"There's nothing in it, Marge," he said to me one evening. "There's only one sure way to win—back every horse in the race with another man's money. I tell a customer the tale that I was shaving a well-known trainer that morning, and that the trainer had given me a certainty; all I ask is that the customer will put half-a-crown on for me. I repeat the process, changing the name of the certainty, until I have got all risks covered. I know it's old fashioned, but I like it. It demands nothing but patience, and it cannot possibly go wrong."

But it did go wrong. He was telling the tale of how the well-known trainer had given him the certainty to a new customer, whom Spearmint had never shaved before. By a

disastrous coincidence it happened that the new customer actually was that well-known trainer. He seemed to think that Spearmint had taken a liberty with his name, and even to resent it.

Spearmint did not lose the sight of the left eye, as was at one time feared, but his looks have never been quite the same since his nose was broken.

My next brother, Orby, was born in 1870. He could do the most graceful and charming things. When his namesake won the Derby in 1907, he immediately acquired a complimentary Irish accent, and employed it in the narration of humorous stories. An accent acquired at the age of thirty-seven is perhaps liable to lack conviction, and I always thought that my brother was over-scrupulous in beginning every sentence with the word "Bedad." Like myself, he simply did not know what fear was, and in consequence told his Irish stories in his own Irish accent to a real Irishman. However, now that he has got his new teeth in you would never know that he had been hit. It was said of him by a great legal authority—I forget in which police-court—that he had the best manners and the least honesty of any taxi-driver on the Knightsbridge rank.

Another brother, Sunstar, acquired considerable reputation by his skill in legerdemain. If you lent him a watch or a coin, with one turn of his hand he would make it disappear; he could do the same thing when

you had not lent it. He could make anything disappear that was not absolutely screwed to the floor, and at public-houses where he was known the pewter from which he drank was always chained to the bar. He had something of my own quixotic nature, and would probably have taken the rest if he had wanted it. One day at Ascot he made a stranger's watch disappear. When he came to examine his newly-acquired property he was disappointed to find that the watch was a four-and-sixpenny American Everbright—"Puts you wrong, Day and night." He was on the point of throwing it away when the kindly thought came to him that perhaps the stranger attached some sentimental value to that watch; indeed, there seemed to be no other possible reason for wearing it. Sunstar determined to replace the watch in the stranger's pocket. He did his best, but he was far more practised in removing than in replacing. The stranger—a hulking, cowardly brute—caught my brother with his hand in his pocket, and failed to grasp the altruism of his motives, and that is why poor Sunnie walks a little lame.

He is not with us at present. He had made quite a number of things disappear, and a censorious world is ever prone to judge by disappearances. It became expedient—and even necessary—for my brother to make himself disappear, and he did so.

The Second Extract, as they say on the film, will follow immediately.

Second Extract

EBULLIENT YOUTH

I HAVE been studying the beautiful pages of the autobiography of my Great Example—hereinafter to be called the G.E. It is wonderful to be admitted to the circle of the elect, week after week, at the low rate of twopence a time. Why, I've paid more to see the pictures.

Considering the price, one ought not to carp. The G.E. says in one extract that she has lost every female friend she ever had, with the exception of four. In a subsequent extract she names six women whose friendship has remained loving and true to her since girlhood. She speaks of a four-line stanza as a couplet. She imputes a "blasphemous tirade" to a great man of science who certainly never uttered one. She says that she had a conversation with Lord Salisbury about the fiscal controversy, in which he took no part, the year after his death. But why make a fuss about little things like this? If you write in bed at the rate of one thousand words an hour, accidents are sure to happen.

But there is just one of the G.E.'s sentences that is worrying me and keeping me awake at night. Here it is—read it carefully:

"I wore the shortest of tweed skirts,

knickerbockers of the same stuff, top-boots, a cover-coat, and a coloured scarf round my head."

And all very nice too, no doubt. But consider the terrific problem involved.

She does not say that the skirt and knickerbockers were made *of the same kind of stuff*. If she had, I could have understood it, and my natural delicacy would for ever have kept me from the slightest allusion to the subject.

What she does say is that the skirt and knickerbockers were made *of the same stuff*. That is very different, and involves hideous complications.

Firstly, it must mean that the knickerbockers were made out of the skirt. Well, there may have been surplus material from that coloured scarf, and it is not for me to say. But, secondly, it must also mean that the skirt was made out of the knickerbockers. Oh, help!

No, I positively refuse. I will not say another word. There are limits. Only an abstruse theologian with a taste for the more recondite niceties of obscure heresies could possibly do justice to it.

All change, please. The next item on the programme will be a succinct account of my ebullient girlhood.

I cannot say that I loved the Warren, my ancestral home. The neighbours called it the Warren, but I can't think why. The Post Office said it was No. 4, Catley Mews, Kentish

Town, and dear papa—who always had the *mot juste*—sometimes said that it was hell.

We were a high-spirited family with clean-cut personalities, penetrating voices, short tempers, high nervous tension, and small feet. Don't you wish you were like that?

All the same, there were only the four rooms over the stable. At times there were fifteen or sixteen of us at home, and also the lodger—I shall speak of him presently. And when you have five personal quarrels, baby, the family wash, a sewing-machine, three mouth-organs, fried bacon, and a serious political argument occurring simultaneously in a restricted establishment, something has to go. As a rule, dear papa went. He would make for Regent's Park, and find repose in the old-world calm of the parrot-house at the Zoo.

But there is always room on the top—it is a conviction on which I have ever acted. When I felt too cramped and stifled in the atmosphere of the Warren, I would climb out on the roof. There, with nothing on but my nightgown, tennis shoes, and the moonlight, I would dance frenetically. The tiles would break loose beneath my gossamer tread and, accompanied by sections of gutter, go poppity-swish into the street below and hit all manner of funny things. I fancy that some of the funny things complained. I know the police called, and I seem to remember rather a nasty letter from the landlord's agent. I had a long interview with mamma on the subject. She pointed out that if I slipped

and fell I should probably make a nasty dent in the pavement, and with many tears I promised to relinquish the practice.

I used to ride on the Heath when I had the opportunity, but I cannot pretend that I was up to the standard of the G.E. I do not think I ever rode up a staircase. I certainly never threw my horse down on the marble floor of the hall of the Warren. There were several reasons for this. Firstly, the Warren had not got a hall, and if it had had a hall, the hall would not have had a marble floor. Secondly, the horses I rode were likely to be wanted again, being in fact the ponies that unsuspecting tradesmen stabled at Catley Mews. Bogey Nutter looked after them, and I could always do what I liked with Bogey. He was perhaps the most profuse proposer I ever met. At one time he always proposed to me once a day and twice on Bank holidays. I was such a dashing, attractive creature, what ?

As to my education, a good deal depends on what is meant by education. The kind that was ladled out at the County Council establishment made little effect upon me. But I was pretty quick at figures, and knew that an investment of half-a-crown at eleven to eight should bring me in a profit of three-and five—provided that the horse won and the man at the fishmonger's round the corner paid up. My brother Lemberg had the same talent. If he bought a packet of fags and paid with a ten-shilling note, he could

always negotiate the change so that he made ninepence for himself and had the cigarettes thrown in. His only mistake was in trying to do it twice at the same shop, but the scar over his right eye hardly shows now. A sharp-cornered tobacco-tin was not the thing to have hit him with anyhow.

For autobiographical purposes always treat a deficiency as if it were a gift. The G.E. was apparently a duffer at arithmetic, but she tells you so in a way that makes you admire her for it. All the same I wish I had been one of those factory-girls that she used to reclaim in their dinner-hour; I am fundamentally honest, but I never could miss a chance when it was thrown at me.

My education in dancing was irregular, as that greasy Italian did not wheel his piano round every week. However I acquired sufficient proficiency to attract attention, and that is the great thing in life. The Italian offered me twopence a day to go on his round with him and dance while he turned the handle. I told Signor Hokey-pokey what I thought of the offer, and I have some talent for language, if not for languages. So, as he could not get me, he did the next best thing and bought a monkey.

I was by far the most spiritual of the family. But my brother Minoru attended chapel regularly, until they stopped collecting the offertory in open plates and substituted locked boxes with a slot in them. He found another chapel that seemed more promising,

but he attended it only once. I shall always consider that the policeman was needlessly rough with him, for Minoru said distinctly that he would go quietly.

My sisters and myself had a fascination for the other sex that was almost incredible. At one time we had a Proposal Competition every week; each of us put in sixpence, and the girl who got the greatest number of proposals took the pool. Casey or I generally won. Then one week I encountered on the Heath the annual beanfeast of the Pottey Asylum for the Feeble-minded, and won with a score of a hundred and seven, and I think the others said it was not fair. Anyhow, the competitions were discontinued.

Really, the way our lodger pestered my sisters and myself with his absolute inattentions is difficult to explain. Anyone might have thought that he did not know we were there. While the Proposal Competitions were on, not one of us thought it worth while to waste time on the man. We could get a better return for the same amount of fascination in other quarters. Afterwards I thought that possibly his employment in the milk-trade might be the cause of his extraordinary mildness, and that it would be kind to offer him a little encouragement.

He usually went for a walk on Sunday mornings, and one Sunday I said that I would accompany him.

"Better not," he said. "Looks to me like rain."

"But you have an umbrella," I pointed out.

"Aye," he said, "and when two people share one umbrella, they both get all the drippings from it and none of the protection. You take a nice book and read for a bit."

"No," I said. "I'm coming with you, and though it's Leap Year, I definitely promise not to propose to you."

"Well," he said, "that makes a difference."

I thrust my arm into his gaily and confidentially, and he immediately unhooked. We went on to the Heath together.

"I was once told by a palmist," I said, "that I had a mysterious and magnetic attraction for men."

"Those palmists will say anything," he said. "It's just the other way round really."

"Perhaps," I said. "I know I have an unlimited capacity for love—and nobody seems to want it."

"Ah," he said, "it's a pity to be overstocked with a perishable article. It means parting with it at a loss."

What could I say to a brute like that? And I had nobody there to protect me.

"I wish," I said, "that you'd look if I've a fly in my eye."

"If you had, you'd know," he answered. "The fly sees to that."

Some minutes elapsed before I asked him to tie my shoe-lace.

He looked down and said that it was not undone.

I simply turned round and left him, I was not going to stay there to be insulted.

However, he must have been ashamed of himself, for two days later he sub-let his part of the floor in one of the rooms at the Warren to an Irish family. If he was not ashamed, he was frightened.

Yet, curiously enough, that cowardly brute moulded my future.

The influx of the Irish family into the Warren drove me out of it. It made me feel the absolute necessity for a wider sphere.

On leaving home I took an indeterminate position in a Bayswater boarding-house. At any rate, my wages and food were determined, but my hours of work were not.

A boarding-house is a congeries of people who have come down. The proprietoress never dreamed that she would have to earn her own living like that—though she gets everything to a knife-edge certainty in the first week. Then in the drawing-room you have military people who have thundered, been saluted, been respected—and superseded. And nobody can make worse clothes look better. The cook explains why she's not in Grosvenor Square, and the elderly Swiss waiter says that he has been in places where pace was not everytink. If you're out looking for depression, try a boarding-house.

I stayed there a week and then said I was going. The lady said she knew the law and I couldn't. So I said I would stay, and was sorry that the state of my nerves would mean a good deal in breakages.

I left at the end of the week.

Third Extract

Gladstone—Mr. Lloyd George—In-memorison—Dr. Benger Horlick.

After this I had a long succession of different situations. It is possible for a girl to learn the work of any branch of domestic service in a week, if she wishes to do it, with the exception of the work of a cook or a personal maid. But then, it is quite possible to take a situation as a cook, and to keep it, without knowing anything appreciable about the work. Thousands of women have done it, and are still doing it. I never went as personal maid—I dislike familiarity—but with that exception I played, so to speak, every instrument in the orchestra.

I acquired an excellent stock of testimonials, of which some were genuine. The others were due to the kindly heart and vivid imagination of my sister Casey, now Mrs. Morgenstein.

I rarely kept my places, and never kept my friends. The only thing I did keep was a diary. A diary is evidence. So if you see anything about anybody in these pages, you can believe it without hesitation. Do, please. You see, if you hesitate, you may never believe it.

I well remember the first and only time that I met Gladstone. I was staying with Lady

Bilberry at the time at her house in Half Moon Street. She was a woman with real charm and wit, but somewhat irritable. Most of the people I've met were irritable or became so, and I can't think why. I may add that I only stayed out my month as too much was expected. Besides, I'd been told there was a boy for the rough work and there never was.

But to return to Gladstone. I wrote down every precious word of my conversation with him at the time, and the eager and excited reader may now peruse it in full.

GLADSTONE : Lady Bilberry at home ?

MARGE : Yes, sir.

GLADSTONE : Thanks.

MARGE : What name, please ?

He gave me his name quite simply, without any attempt at rudeness or facetiousness. I should say that this was typical of the whole character of the man. With a beautiful and punctilious courtesy he removed his hat—not a very good hat—on entering the house. I formed the impression from the ease with which he did this that the practice must have been habitual with him.

The only thing that mars this cherished memory is that it was not the Gladstone you mean, nor any relative of his, but a gentleman of the same name who had called to see if he could interest her ladyship in a scheme for the recovery of some buried treasure. He did not stay long, and Lady Bilberry said I ought to have known better.

About this time I received by post a set of verses which bear quite a resemblance to the senile vivacity of the verses which the real Gladstone addressed to my illustrious example of autobiographical art. The verses I received were anonymous, and as a matter of fact the postmark on the envelope was Beaconsfield. Still, you never know, do you ?

MARGE.

When Pentonville's over and comes the release,
With a year's supervision perhaps by the p'lice,
Your longing to meet all your pals may be large,
But make an exception, and do not ask Marge.

She's Aspasia, Pavlova, Tom Sayers, Tod Sloan,
Spinoza, and Barnum, and Mrs. Chapone ;
For a bloke that has only just got his discharge,
She's rather too dazzling a patchwork, is Marge.

Never mind, never mind, you have got to go slow,
One section a year is the most you can know ;

If you study a life-time, you'll jest on the barge
Of Charon with madd'ningly manifold Marge.

By the way, whenever we change houses a special pantechnicon has to be engaged to take all the complimentary verses that have from time to time been addressed to me. Must be a sort of something about me somehow, don't you think ?

I cannot pretend that I was on the same terms of intimate friendship with Mr. Lloyd George. I spoke to him only once.

It was when we were in Downing Street. There was quite a crowd of us there, and it had been an evening of exalted and roseate patriotism. I gazed up at the window of No. 10 and said, as loudly as I could :

" Lloyd George ! Lloyd George ! "

Most of the others in the crowd said the same thing with equal force. Then an uneducated policeman came up to me and asked me to pass along, please, adding that Mr. Lloyd George was not in London. So, simply replying " All right, face," I passalongpleased.

However, in spite of all that bound me so closely to the great political world, I could not help feeling the claims of literature. I am sensitive to every claim. It is the claim of history, for example, that compels me to write my autobiography. I seem to see all around me a thousand human arts and activities crying for my help and interest. They seem to say " Marge, Marge, more Marge ! " in the words that Goethe himself might have used. And whenever I hear the call I have to give myself.

I doubt if any girl ever gave herself away quite as much as I have done.

One day in November I met Chummie Popbright in the neighbourhood of Cambridge Circus. He was a man with very little *joie de vivre*, *ventre à terre*, or *esprit de corps*. He had fair hair and no manners, and was very, very fond of me. He held a position in the Post Office, and was, in fact, emptying a pillar-box when I met him. I record the conversation.

CHUMMIE : Blessed if it ain't Marge ! And what would you like for a Christmas present ?

MARGE : I want to spend a week or so at the house of the great poet, Lord Inmemorison. If you really wish to please me, you will use your influence to get me a job there. Your uncle being Inmemorison's butler, you ought to be able to work it.

CHUMMIE : Might. What would you go as ?

MARGE : Anything—but temporary parlour-maid is my strong suit.

CHUMMIE : And what's your game ?

MARGE : I'm sick of patronizing politicians and want to patronize a poet. When all's said and done, Inmemorison is a proper certificated poet. Besides, I want to put something by for my rainy autobiography.

CHUMMIE : Oh, well. I'll try and lay a pipe for it. May come off or may not.

Chummie managed the thing to perfection. My sister Casey wrote me one of the best testimonials I have ever had, and by Christmas I was safely installed for a week. Chum-

mie's uncle treated me with the utmost consideration, and it is to him that I owe many of the thrilling details that I am now able to present to the panting public. Although there was a high leather screen in the drawing-room which was occasionally useful to me, my opportunities for direct observation were limited.

Lord Inmemorison had a magnificent semi-detached mansion (including a bath-room, h. and c.) in one of the wildest and loneliest parts of Wandsworth Common. The rugged beauty of the scenery around is reflected in many of his poems.

There were, as was to be expected, several departures from ordinary convention in the household. Dinner was at seven. The poet went to bed immediately after dinner, and punctually at ten reappeared in the drawing-room and began reading his poems aloud.

The family generally went to bed at ten sharp.

I heard him read once. There were visitors in the house who wished to hear the great man, and it was after midnight before a general retirement could take place. He had a rich, sonorous, over-proof, pre-war voice, considerable irritability, and a pretty girl sitting on his knee. The last item was, of course, an instance of poetical licence.

The girl had asked him to read from "Maud" and he had consented. He began with his voice turned down so low that in

my position behind the screen I could only just catch the opening lines :

" Hail to thee, blithe spirit !
Bird thou never wert . . ."

He opened the throttle a little wider when he came to the passage :

" His head was bare, his matted hair
Was buried in the sand."

He read that last line " was serried in the band," but immediately corrected himself. And the poignant haunting repetition of the last lines of the closing stanza were given out on the full organ :

" And everywhere that Mary went—
And everywhere that Mary went—
And everywhere that Mary went—
The lamb was sure to go."

It was a great—a wonderful experience for me, and I shall never forget it.

I have spoken of his irritability. It is not unnatural in a great poet. He must live with his exquisite sentient nerves screwed up to such a pitch that at any moment something may give.

For example, one evening he was sitting with a girl on his knee, and had just read to her these enchanting lines in which he speaks of hearing the cuckoo call.

INMEMORISON (*gruffly and suddenly*) : What bird says cuckoo ?

GIRL (*with extreme nervous agitation*) : The rabbit.

INMEMORISON : No, you fool—it's the nightingale.

The girl burst into tears and said she would not play any more. I think she was wrong. Whenever I hear any criticism of myself I always take it meckly and gently, whether it is right or wrong—it has never been right yet—and try to see if I cannot learn something from it. What the girl should have said was : " Now it's your turn to go out, and we'll think of something."

Another occasion when Inmemorison was perhaps more pardonably annoyed was when a young undergraduate asked him to read out one of his poems.

" Which ? " said Inmemorison.

I am told that the thirty seconds of absolute silence which followed this question seemed like an eternity, and that the agony on the young man's face was Aeschylean. He did not know any precise answer to the question.

" Which ? " repeated Inmemorison, like the booming of a great bell at a young man's funeral.

The young man made a wild and misjudged effort, and got right off the target.

" Well," he said, " one of my greatest favourites of course is ' Kissingcup's Race.' "

" Is it, indeed ? " said the Poet. " If you turn to the left on leaving the house, the second on the right will take you straight to the station."

The young man never forgave it. And that, so I have always been told, is how the

first Browning Society came to be founded.

It was a meeting with this undergraduate—purely accidental on my part—in the romantic garden of the poet's house that first turned my mind towards the university town of Oxbridge. I had no difficulty in finding employment as a waitress there in a restaurant where knowledge of the business was considered less essential than a turn for repartee and some gift for keeping the young of our great nobility in their proper place. It was not long before I had made the acquaintance of quite a number of undergraduates. Some of them had a marked tendency towards rapidity, but soon learned that the regulation of the pace would remain with me.

One Sunday morning I had consented to go for a walk with one of my young admirers—a nice boy, with more nerve than I have ever encountered in any human being except myself. It happened by chance that we encountered the Dean of his college. The Dean, with an unusual condescension—for which there may possibly have been a reason—stopped to speak to my companion, who without the least hesitation introduced the Dean to me as his sister.

That was my first meeting with Dr. Benger Horlick, the celebrated Dean of Belial.

No social occasion has ever yet found me at a loss. The more difficult and dramatic it is, the more thoroughly do I enjoy its delicate manipulation. I could not deny the relationship which had been asserted, without

involving my young friend. The only alternative was to play up to it, and I played up. The perfect management of old men is best understood by young girls.

I told him that I was staying with mamma, and mentioned a suitable hotel, adding that I was so sorry I had to return to town that afternoon, as I had begun to love the scholastic peace of Oxbridge and valued so much the opportunity of meeting its greatest men. I was bright and poetical in streaks, and every shy—if I may use the expression—hit the coco-nut. Sometimes I glanced at Willie, my pseudo-brother. His face twitched a little, but he never actually gave way to his feelings. The Dean had ceased to pay much attention to him.

For about a quarter of an hour the Dean strolled along with us. At parting, he held my hand—for a minute longer than was strictly necessary—and said:

"You have interested me—er—profoundly. May I hope that when you get back to Grosvenor Square, you will sometimes spare a few moments from the fashionable circles in which you move, and write to me?"

I said that it would be a great honour to me to be permitted to do so.

"I hope," he added, "that you will visit Oxbridge again, and that you will then renew an acquaintance which, though accidental in its origin, has none the less impressed me—er—very much."

After his departure Willie became hilarious

and I became very angry with him. He persisted that everything was all right. I had put up a fine performance and had only to continue it. The Dean would no doubt write to me at Grosvenor Square, and Willie assured me that he had his father's butler on a string, and that the butler sorted the letters. I would receive the Dean's epistles at any address I would give him, and would reply on the Grosvenor Square notepaper.

"I've got chunks of it in a writing-case at my rooms," he said, "and I'll send it round to you."

I had to consent to this. However, the next day I skipped for London, somewhat to the disappointment of the restaurant that I adorned, and still more to the disappointment of Willie. But, as I wrote to him, he had brought it on himself. I could not take the risk of another accidental meeting with Dr. Benger Horlick.

Nor, as a matter of fact, did we ever meet again. But for three years we corresponded with some frequency; it was a thin-ice, high-wire business, but I pulled it through.

No doubt the task was made easier for me by the fact that the Dean was a singularly simple-minded man. Reverence for the aristocracy had become with him almost a religion. When he was brought—or believed himself to be brought—in contact with the aristocracy, his intellectual vision closed in a swoon of ecstasy. Snob? Oh, dear, no! Of course not. What can have made you

think that? It was simply that the aristocracy appealed to him very much as romance did—he was outside it, but liked to get a near view.

The G.E. found that letters, however delightful, bored her when they were scattered through a biography. For that reason she gave one set of letters all together. I do not see myself why, if a thing bores you when you get a little of it at a time, it should bore you less when you get a lot of it. But, determined to follow my brilliant model with simple faith and humility, I now append extracts from the letters I received from Dr. Benger Horlick.

"I wish I could persuade you to be less precise in your language. If you say what your opinion is, you should take care to be beautiful but unintelligible. Commit yourself to nothing. Words were given us to conceal our thoughts, and with a little practice and self-discipline will conceal them even from ourselves. A candid friend once complained to me that in my translation from the Greek it was sometimes impossible for him to know which of two different *lectiones* I was translating. As a matter of fact, though I did not tell him this, I did not know either. Especially useful is this when one is confronted with a rude, challenging, direct question as to any point in religion or politics; I reply with a sonorous and, I hope, well-balanced sentence, from which the actual meaning has been carefully extracted, and so escape in the fog. It is indeed from one point of view a mercy that

most people are too cowardly or too ashamed to say that they have failed to comprehend. Yet if they had my passion for truth it might be better. Truth is very precious to me—sometimes too precious to give away."

"It is good of you to say that the fourteen pages of good advice did not bore you. Can it have been that you did not read them? No Dean—and perhaps no don—who has been in that portentous position as long as I have can fail to become a perennial stream of advice. It is the Nemesis of those who have all their lives been treated with more respect than they have deserved. I am the only exception with which I am acquainted. Child, why do you not make more use of your noble gifts for dancing, amateur theatricals, and general conversation? And yet I'm not grumbling. Only I mean to say, don't you know? Of course, they all do it—the people in the great world to which you, and occasionally I, belong. Still, there it is, isn't it? And you write me such soothing full-cream letters with only an occasional snag in them. So bless you, my child. I do trust that the report which comes to me that you are going with the Prince of Wales, Mrs. H. Ward, and a Mr. Arthur Roberts to shoot kangaroos in Australia is at least exaggerated. These marsupials, though their appearance is sufficiently eccentric to suggest the conscientious objector, will—I am credibly informed—fight desperately in defence of their young. If I may venture to suggest, try rabbits."

"I am delighted to hear that you are not the author of the two articles attacking Society. The fact that they happen to be signed with the name of another well-known lady had made me think it possible that this might be the case. Society? It is a great mystery. I can hardly think of it without taking off my boots and prostrating myself orientally. To criticize it is a mistake; it is even, if I may for once use a harsh word, subversive. It is the only one we've got. Oh, hush! Only in whispers at the dead of night to the most trusted friend under the seal of secrecy can we think of criticizing it. But holding, as I do, perhaps the most important public position in the Continent of Europe, if not in the whole world—responsible, as I am, for what may be called the sustenance of the next generation—I do feel called upon to carry out any repairs and re-decoration of the social fabric that may be required. You with your universal influence which—until Einstein arrives—will be the only possible explanation of the vagaries in the orbit of Mercury, can do as much, or nearly as much. Do it. But never speak of it. Oh, hush! (Sorry—I forgot I'd mentioned that before.)

"In reply to your inquiry, I never read 'Robert Elsmere,' but understand from a private source that it saved many young men from reading 'David Grieve.' Your second inquiry as to the lady-love of my first youth is violent—very violent. Suppose you mind your own business."

Fourth Extract

THE SOLES

I do not know why we were called the Soles. Enemies said it was because we were flat, fishy, and rather expensive.

Our set comprised the upper servants of some of the best houses in Mayfair. Looking back at it now, I can see that no similar body ever had such a tremendous influence. It may not have been entirely due to us that gravity varies inversely as the square of the distance, but at least we acquiesced. And what we did in home and foreign politics has scarcely yet been suspected.

The reason for our influence is sufficiently obvious. Our great leader, James Arthur Bunting, was perhaps the most perfect butler that the world has yet seen; his magnificent presence, plummy voice, exquisite tact, and wide knowledge made him beyond price. We had other butlers whom it would have been almost equally difficult to replace. We had chefs who with a chain of marvellous dinners bound their alleged employers to their chariot-wheels. Nominally, Parliament ruled the country, but we never had any doubt who ruled Parliament.

To take but one instance, the sudden *volte face* of Lord Baringstoke on the Home Rule

Question. This created a great sensation at the time, and various explanations were suggested to account for it. Nobody guessed the truth. The fact is that Mr. Bunting tendered his resignation.

Lord Baringstoke was much distressed. An increase of salary was immediately suggested and waved aside.

"It is not that, m'lord," said Bunting. "It is a question of principle. Your lordship's expressed views as to Ireland are not, if I may say so, the views of my friends and of myself. And on that subject we feel deeply. Preoccupied with that difference, if I remained, I could no longer do justice to your lordship nor to myself. My wounded and bleeding heart—— "

"Oh, never mind your bleeding heart, Bunting," said Baringstoke. "Do I understand that this is your only reason for wanting to go? "

"That is so, m'lord."

"Then, supposing that I reconsidered my views as to Ireland and found that they were in fact the opposite of what I had previously supposed, you would remain? "

"With very great pleasure."

"Then in that case you had better wait a few days. I'm inclined to think that everything can be arranged."

"Very good, m'lord."

Less than a week later, Lord Baringstoke's public recantation was the talk of London. In a speech of considerable eloquence he

showed how the merciless logic of facts had convinced his intellect, and his conscience had compelled him to abandon the position he had previously taken up. Fortunately, you can prove absolutely anything about Ireland. It is merely a question of what facts you will select and what you will suppress.

Mr. Bunting is, I believe, still with Lord Baringstoke. This was, perhaps, one of the principal triumphs of the Soles. There were many others. We had our own secret service, and I should here acknowledge with respect and admiration the Gallic ingenuity of two of the Soles, Monsieur Colbert and Monsieur Normand, in reconstructing fragmentary letters taken from the waste-paper baskets of the illustrious.

Naturally, we had to suffer from the jealousy and malice of those who had not been asked to join us, and a rumour even was spread abroad that we played bridge for sixpence a hundred. There was no truth in it. There have been, and still are, gambling clubs among the younger men-servants of the West-end, but we never gambled. Mr. Bunting would not have liked it at all. We were serious. We did try to live up to our ideals, and some of our members actually succeeded in living beyond their incomes. Our principal recreation was pencil-games, mostly of our own invention.

In this connection I have rather a sad incident to relate. On one occasion we had a competition to see which of us could write

the flattest and least pointed epigram in rhyme. The prize for men consisted of two out-size Havannah cigars, formerly the property of Lord Baringstoke, kindly presented by Mr. Bunting.

Percy Binder, first footman to the Earl of Dilwater, was extremely anxious to secure this prize. He took as the subject of his epigram the sudden death of a man on rising from prayer. This was in such lamentably bad taste that he did not win the prize, but otherwise it would have certainly been his. His four lines could not have been surpassed for clumsy and laboured imbecility. The last two ran :

" But when for aid he ceased to beg,
The wily devil broke his leg."

And then came a terrible discovery. Percy Binder had stolen these lines from the autobiography of my own G.E. She says, by the way, that their author was " the last of the wits." But how can you be last in a race in which you never start ? It is always safe to say what you think, but sometimes dangerous to give your reasons for thinking it.

That, however, is a digression. Percy Binder was given to understand that we did not know him in future. Mr. Bunting was so upset that he declared the competition cancelled, and smoked the prize himself. He said afterwards that what annoyed him most was the foolishness of Mr. Binder's idea that his plagiarism would be undetected.

" He is," said Mr. Bunting, " like the silly

ostrich that lays its eggs in the sand in order to escape the vigilance of its pursuers."

One of our pencil-games was known as Inverted Conundrums, and played as follows. One person gave the answer to a riddle, and mentioned one word to be used in the question. The rest then had to write down what they thought the question would be. The deafness of dear Violet Orpington sometimes spoiled this game.

For instance, I had once given as an answer "bee-hive," and said that one word in the question was "correct."

The first question I read out was from George Leghorn. He had written: "If a cockney nurse wished to correct a child, what insect-home would she name?" This was accepted.

The next question was from Violet Orpington: "If you had never corrected a naughty boy before, where would you correct him?"

"But, Violet," I said, "the answer to that could not be 'bee-hive.'"

"Oh," she said, "you said 'hive,' did you? I thought you said something else."

I have never been able to guess what it was she thought I had said; and she refused to tell me.

Another of our pencil-games was Missing Rhymes. One of us would write a decca-syllabic couplet—we always called it a quatrain, as being a better-class word—and the rhyme in the second line would not be actually given but merely indicated.

For example, I myself wrote the following little sonnet :

" I have an adoration for
One person only, namely *je*."

To any reader who is familiar with the French language, this may seem almost too easy, but I doubt if anybody who knew no language but modern Greek would guess it. For the benefit of the uninitiated I may add that the French word *je* is pronounced " mwor," thus supplying the missing rhyme.

Millie Wyandotte disgraced herself with the following lyric :

" After her dance, Salome, curtseying, fell,
And shocked the Baptist with her scream
of ' Bother ! ' "

She had no sooner read it out than Mr. Bunting rose in his place and said gravely :

" I can only speak definitely for myself, but it is my firm belief that all present, with the exception of Miss Wyandotte, have too much refinement to be able to guess correctly the missing rhyme in this case." Loud and prolonged applause.

George Leghorn was particularly happy at these pencil games, and to him is due this very clever combination of the lyrical and the acrostical :

" My first a man is, and my next a trap ;
My whole's forbidden, lest it cause
trouble."

The answer to the acrostic is " mantrap " ; the missing rhyme is " mishap." The entire solution was given in something under half

an hour by Popsie Bantam. She was a very bright girl, and afterwards married a man in the Guards (L.N.W.R.).

Mr. Bunting, a rather strong party-politician, one night submitted this little triolet:

"When the Great War new weapons bade us forge,
Whom did the nation trust? 'Twas thou, Asquith!"

The missing rhyme was guessed immediately, in two places, as the auctioneers say.

However, by our next quinquennial meeting Nettie Minorca had thought out the following rejoinder:

"When history's hand corrects the current myth,
Whose name will she prefer? 'Tis thine, Lloyd George."

Yes, dear Nettie had a belated brilliance—the wit of the staircase, only more so. We always said that Nettie could do wonderful things if only she were given time.

She was given time ultimately, and is still doing it, but that was in a totally different connection. She inserted an advertisement stating that she was a thorough good cook. First-class references. Eight years in present situation in Exeter, and leaving because the family was going abroad. Wages asked, £36 per annum. No kitchen-maid required. No less than twelve families were so anxious to receive the treasure that they offered her return-fare between Exeter and London, and her expenses, to secure a personal interview

with her. She collected the boodle from all twelve. And she was living in Bryanstone Square at the time. She is lost to us now.

As dear old Percy Cochin, also one of the Soles, once said to me: "We are here to-day, and gone at the end of our month."

Violet Orpington had an arresting appearance, and walked rather like a policeman also. Her hair was a rich raw sienna, and any man would have made love to her had she but carried an ear-trumpet. She is the "retiring Violet" of verse seven.* Millie Wyandotte was malicious and unintelligent; she looked well in white, but was too heavily built for my taste. I may add, as evidence of my impartiality, that she laid a table better than any woman I ever knew; in fact, she took first prize in a laying competition. Nettie Minorca was "black but comely," and had Spanish blood in her veins. She is the "gipsy" mentioned in verse one-and-a-half. Popsie Bantam was *petite*. Her profile was admired, but I always thought it a little beaky myself. I myself was the least beautiful, but the most attractive. Allusions to me will be found in verses 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 12-19, 24, 57-60, 74, 77, 87, 97, and 102-3468.

George Leghorn was an Albino, but his figure was very graceful. From the specimen which I have already given, it will be easy to believe that his wit was fluorescent, deter-

**Publisher*: But you don't give the verses.
Author: I know. It's a little idea I got from an excellent Sunday newspaper.

gent, and vibratory. He afterwards became a well-known personality on the turf. He gained a considerable fortune by laying the odds; his family were all reputed to be good layers.

Dear old Peter Cochin was staunch and true. He reminds me of something that my illustrious model says of another man. She says that he "would risk telling me or anyone he loved, before confiding to an inner circle, faults which both he and I think might be corrected." Grammar was no doubt made for slaves—not for the brilliant and autobiographical. All the same, a prize should be offered to anybody who can find the missing "risk" in mentioning to another a point on which both are agreed.

She adds that she has had "a long experience of inner circles." There, it must be admitted, she is ahead of me. But the only inner circle of which I have had a long experience has been much improved since it was electrified.

In congratulating Peter upon a new appointment, with three under him, I asked when I first met him. His reply was particularly staunch, and I quote from it:

"It was in May 28, 1913. The hour was 1.38.5 Greenwich Time, and I shall never forget it. You were sixteen then, and the effect as you came into the room was quintessential. Suddenly the sunlight blazed, the electric light went on automatically till the fuses gave way, the chimney caught fire, the

roof fell in, the petrol tank exploded, old R—y said that he should never care to speak to his wife again, and the butler dropped the Veuve Clicquot. After that the shooting party came in, but for some reason or other the sentence was not carried out."

I have very few staunch friends, and many of them have had to be discarded from weakness; but when they are staunch—well, they really are. The only trouble with Peter Cochin was that he was too cautious. He was given to under-statement. I do not think he gives a really full and rich idea of the effect I habitually produced.

I sometimes think that I am almost too effective. Still, as I said before, the Latin word "margo" does mean "the limit."

Fifth Extract

MISFIRES

My family had a curious dread that I should marry a groom. I never did. To be quite honest, I never had the opportunity. But I did get engaged to quite a lot of other things.

My first engagement was when I was very, very young. He was a humorous man, and perhaps I was wrong in taking him so seriously. Still, he must have adored me. When I accepted him his hair turned completely white —an infallible test of the depth of emotion.

He was an excellent whip. It used to be a wonderful sight to see him taking a pair of young horses down Ludgate Hill on a greasy day at noon, with the whole road chock-a-block with traffic, lighting a pipe with a wooden match with one hand, carrying on an animated conversation with the other with a fare on the front seat, dropping white-hot satire on the heads of drivers less efficient than himself, and always getting the 'bus through safely with about an inch to spare on each side.

On the other hand, he was almost entirely ignorant of Marcus Aurelius, Henry James, Step-dancing, Titian, the Manners and Customs of Polite Society, Factory-Girl Reclamation, Cardinal Newman, or the Art of Self-

advertisement. He said, with an entire absence of pretension, that these things were not on his route.

When I announced our engagement the members of my family who were present, about seventeen of them, all swooned, except dear papa, who said in his highly-strung way that if I married anybody he would put the R.S.P.C.A. on to me.

I said what I thought, and fled for consolation to Casey, my married sister. But she also was discouraging.

"Marge," she said, "give it a miss. You have a rich nature, beautiful hair, a knowledge of the world, nervous tension, some of the appearance of education, and four pound fifteen put by in the Post Office. You must look higher."

I have always detested scenes—which, perhaps, seems strange in a girl as fond of the limelight as I was. I began to re-consider the question. Accidentally, I discovered that he had a wife already. What with one thing and another, I thought it best to write and give him up. He immediately resigned his appointment with the London General, gave me a long-priced certainty for the Oaks, and left for New York. When he returned, two years later, his hair was pale green.

But if the engagement did not come off, the certainty for the Oaks did. In consequence of this I left for Ramsgate by the "Marguerite" some days later. Dressed? Well, you should have seen me.

It chanced that one of the passengers on the boat was Mr. Aaron Birsch. He had been presented to me some weeks before by Mr. Bunting. I knew that he was a turf com missioner, had speculated with success in cottage property, and was commonly reported to be much richer than he looked. Beyond that, I know very little of him. Apparently, however, he had made it his business to know quite a good deal of me. Mr. Bunting was his informant, and I had always been a quite special favourite of the *doyen* of the Soles.

Mr. Birsch came up to me at once. We chatted on various topics, and he told me of something which was likely to be quite useful for Goodwood. Then he said suddenly:

"Matter of fact, there was a bit of private business I wanted a word with you about. This boat's too full of what I call riff-raff. Mouth-organs. Bad taste. Can't hear yourself speak. But we get an hour at Ramsgate, and if you'll take a snack with me there, I can tell you what I've got to say."

More from curiosity than from anything else, I accepted. And I must say that our luncheon conversation was rather remarkable.

BIRSCH: To come to the point, you're the very identical girl that I want Alfred to marry.

MARGE (*innocently*): Alfred?

BIRSCH: Yes, my son.

MARGE: But I have never even seen him.

BIRSCH: And when you have you'll pro-

bably wish you hadn't. But don't let that prejudice you. It's the inside of the head that counts. That boy's got a perfect genius for cottage property and real tact with it. Only last week he raised an old woman's rent a shilling a week, and when he left she gave him a rosebud and said she'd pray for him. It takes some doing—a thing like that. Now, I want a public career for that boy, and if he marries you he can't miss it. Do you know what Mr. Bunting said to me about you?

MARGE (*breathlessly*): But he's so flattering. I think he likes me—I don't know why. I sometimes wonder——

BIRSCH (*just as if I'd never spoken*): Bunting said to me: "That girl, Marge, will get into the newspapers. It may be in the Court News, and it may be in the Police-court News. That will depend on which she prefers. But she'll get there, and she'll stick there! That's what I want for Alfred. Everything's ready for him to start firing, but he needs you to sight the gun.

MARGE: And if you can't get me, whom would you like?

BIRSCH: Well, Lady Artemis Morals has some gift for publicity. But Alfred won't marry a title—say's he rather thinks of making a title for himself. The boy's got ambition. The cash is forthcoming. And you can do the rest.

MARGE: It is a flattering offer. You'll let me think over it?

He kindly consented, and we returned to

the boat. However, on the way back the sea became very rough and unpleasant; and I threw up the idea.

(By the way, you don't mind me writing the dialogue, as above, just as if it were a piece out of a play? I've always brought the sense of the theatre into real life.)

Poor Aaron Birsch! He was only one of the very many men who have been extremely anxious that I should marry somebody else. Two years later Alfred died of cerebral tumescence—a disease to which the ambitious are peculiarly liable. That cat, Millie Wyandotte, happened to say to Birsch that if I had married his son I should now have been a wealthy young widow.

"Anybody who married Marge," said Birsch, "would not die at the end of two years."

"I suppose not," said Millie. "He'd be more likely to commit suicide at the end of one."

I never did like that girl.

But I must speak now of what was perhaps my most serious engagement. Hugo Broke—his mother was one of the Stoneys—was intended from birth for one of the services and selected domestic service. Here it was thought that his height—he was seven foot one—would tell in his favour. However, the Duchess of Exminster, in ordering that the new footman should be dismissed, said that height was desirable, but that this was prolixity.

However, it was not long before he found a congenial sphere for his activities with the London branch of the Auto-extensor Co. of America. The Auto-extensor Co. addresses itself to the abbreviated editions of humanity. It is claimed for the Auto-extensor system that there is absolutely no limit to the increase in height which may be obtained by it, provided of course, that the system is followed exactly, that nothing happens to prevent it, and that the rain keeps off.

Hugo walked into the Regent Street establishment of the Auto-extensor people, and said :

" Good morning. I think I could be of some service to this company as an advertisement."

" I am sure you could," said the manager. " If you will kindly wait a moment while the boy fetches the step-ladder I will come up and arrange terms."

In the result, the large window of the Regent Street establishment was furnished as a club smoking-room or thereabouts. In the very centre, in a chair of exaggerated comfort but doubtful taste, sat Hugo. He was exquisitely attired. He read a newspaper and smoked cigarettes. By his side, in a magnificent frame, was a printed notice, giving a rather fanciful biography of the exhibit.

" This gentleman," the notice ran, " was once a dwarf. For years he suffered in consequence agonies of humiliation, and then a friend called his attention to the Auto-extensor

System of increasing height. He did not have much faith in it, but in desperation he gave it a trial—and it made him what he now is. Look for yourselves. Facts speak louder than words. All we ask you to do is to trust the evidence of your own eyes."

The window proved a great attraction. The crowd before it was most numerous about four o'clock, because every day at that hour a dramatic and exciting scene was witnessed. Putting down his newspaper, Hugo struck a bell on a little table by his side. A page entered through the excessively plush curtains at the back, and Hugo gave a brief and haughty order. The boy somewhat overacted respectful acquiescence, retired through the curtains, and reappeared again with tea and thin bread and butter. Of these delicacies Hugo partook *coram populo*. This carried conviction with it. One onlooker would say to another: "Shows you he's real, don't it? At one time I thought it was only a dummy." And for some time afterwards the assistant in the shop would be kept busy, handing out the gratis explanatory booklet of the Autoextensor Co.

It was in this window that I first saw Hugo. I arrived a little late that afternoon, and missed the first act, where he puts down the newspaper and rings the bell. But I saw the conclusion of the piece.

My eyes filled with tears. Here—here at last—I had met somebody whose chilled-

steel endurance of publicity equalled, and perhaps exceeded, my own.

I entered the shop, procured the explanatory booklet, and asked at what hour they closed. At that hour I met him as he left business, and my first feelings were of disappointment. His clothes were not the exquisite raiment that he had worn as an exhibit in the window. The white spats, the sponge-bag trousers with the knife-edge crease, the gold-rimmed eye-glass, the well-cut morning coat, the too assertive waistcoat—all were the property of the Auto-extensor Co. and not to be worn out of business hours. He now wore a shabby tweed suit and a cap. But he was still a noticeable figure; a happy smile came into the faces of little boys as he went past.

"Like your job?" I said shyly, as I took the seat next to him on the top of the omnibus.

He replied rather gruffly that he supposed a bloke had to work for his living, and all work was work, whatever way you looked at it. Further questions elicited that the pay was satisfactory, but that he did not regard the situation as permanent. The public would get tired of it and some other form of advertisement would be found. He complained, too, that he was supposed to keep up the appearance of a wealthy toff smoking cigarettes continually for a period of seven hours, and the management provided only one small packet of woodbines per diem for him to do it on.

I produced my cigarette-case. It was one

which Lord Baringstoke—always a careless man—had lost. It had been presented to me by dear Mr. Bunting. Hugo said he had not intended anything of that sort, but helped himself.

A quarter of an hour later we had our first quarrel. I asked him if it was cold up where he was. He said morosely that he had heard that joke on his stature a few times before. I told him that if he lived long enough—and I'd never seen anybody living much longer—he was likely to hear it a few times again. He then said that either I could hop off the 'bus or he would, and he didn't care which. After that we both were rather rude. He got me by the hair, and I had just landed a straight left to the point when the conductor came up and said he would not have it.

I became engaged to Hugo that night at 10.41. I remember the time exactly, because Mrs. Pettifer had a rule that all her maids were to be in the house by ten sharp, and I was rather keeping an eye on my watch in consequence.

To tell the truth, we quarrelled very frequently. Different though we were in many respects, we both had irritable, overstrung, tri-chord natures, with hair-spring nerves connected direct to the high-explosive language-mine.

One one occasion I went with him to a paper fancy-dress dance at the rooms attached to the Hopley Arms. I went as "The Sunday Times," my dress being composed of two

copies of that excellent, though inexpensive journal, tastefully arranged on a concrete foundation.

When Millie Wyandotte saw me, she called out: "Hello, Marge! Got into the newspapers at last?" I shall be even with that girl one of these days.

I declined to dance with Hugo at all. I said frankly that I preferred to dance with somebody who could touch the top of my head without stooping. I went off with Georgie Leghorn, and Hugo sat and sulked.

Later in the evening he came up to me and asked if he should get my cloak.

I said irritably: "Of course not. Why should you?"

"Well," he said, "I don't know whether you're aware of it, but you've got three split infinitives in your City article."

"Ah!" I replied. "The next time Millie Wyandotte telephones up to your head, give her my love and tell her not to over-strain herself."

Things went from bad to worse, and after he had alluded to my backbone as my Personal Column, any possibility of reconciliation seemed at an end. I did not know then what a terribly determined person Hugo was.

Georgie Leghorn saw me home. I parted with him at the house, let myself in by the area-gate, locking it after me, and so down the steps and into the kitchen.

There I had just taken off my hair when I heard a shrill whistle in the street outside.

Hurriedly replacing my only beauty, I drew up the blind and looked out. There, up above me on the pavement, was Hugo, stretching away into the distance.

"Called for the reconciliation," he said. "Just open this area gate, will you?"

"At this time of night?" I called, in a tense whisper. "Certainly not."

He stepped back, and in one leap jumped over the area-railings and down on to the window-sill of the kitchen. The next moment he had flung the window up, entered, and stood beside me.

"What do you think of that?" he said calmly.

"Hugo," I said, "I've known some bounders in my time, but not one who could have done that."

We sat down and began discussing the Disestablishment of the Welsh Church, when suddenly the area-gate was rattled and a stern voice outside said "Police."

Instantly, Hugo concealed as much of himself as he could under the kitchen table. There was no help for it. I had to let the policeman in, or he would have roused the household.

"I'm just going to have a look in your kitchen," he said.

"No use," I replied. "The rabbit-pie was finished yesterday."

"Saucy puss, ain't you?" he said, as he entered.

"Well, you might be a sport and tell a girl what you're after."

"Cabman, driving past here a few minutes ago, saw a man jump the area railings and make a burglarious entry by the kitchen window."

"Is that all?" I said. "A man did enter that way a few minutes ago, but it was not a burglar. It was Master Edward, Mrs. Pettifer's eldest son. He'd lost his latch-key—he's always doing it—and that's how it happened. He went straight upstairs to bed, or he'd confirm what I say."

"Went straight up to bed, did he? Did he take his legs off first? I notice there's a pair of them sticking out from under the kitchen table."

"Yes," I admitted, "I've told better lies in my time. Oh, Mr. Policeman, don't be hard. I never wanted my young man to come larking about like this. But—he's not a burglar. He's the exhibit from the Auto-extensor Co.'s in Regent Street. You can pull out the rest of him and see if he isn't."

"That's what I told the cabman," said the policeman. "I said to him: 'You juggins,' I said, 'do you think a burglar who wants to get into a house waits till a cab's going past and then gives a acrobatic exhibition to attract the driver's attention? That's some young fool after one of the maids.' No, I don't want to see the rest of the young man—not if he's like the sample. Get him unwound as soon as you can, and send him about his

business. If he's not out in two minutes, I shall ring the front door, and you'll be in the cart. And don't act so silly another time."

Hugo was out in 1 min. 35sec. He stopped to chat with the policeman, jumped the seven-foot railings into the square garden, and jumped back again, just to show what he could do, and went off.

I gave a long, deep sigh. I always do that when an incident in my life fails to reach the best autobiographical level. I neither knew nor cared what the policeman thought. You see, I would never deserve a bad reputation, but there's nothing else I wouldn't do to get one.

For eighty-four years—my memory for numbers is not absolutely accurate, but we will say eighty-four—for eighty-four years I wrote him a letter every morning and evening of every day, with the exception of Sundays, bank holidays, and the days when I did not feel like it.

But it was not to be. He was not without success in the circus which he subsequently joined, but he was improvident. His income increased in arithmetical progression, and his expenditure in geometrical. This, as Dr. Micawber and Professor Malthus have shown us, must end in disaster. Looking at it from the noblest point of view—the autobiographical—I saw that a marriage with Hugo would inevitably cramp my style.

And so the great sacrifice was made. Our feelings were so intense as we said farewell

that my native reserve and reticence forbid me to describe them. But we parted one night in June, with a tear in the throat and a catch in the eye. As he strode from the park, I looked upward and saw in the brown crags above me some graceful animal silhouetted against an opal sky. I always have said that those Mappin Terraces were an improvement.

Sixth Extract

TESTIMONIALS—ROYAL APPRECIATION

Being what I am, it may readily be supposed that I have received many tributes to the qualities that I possess. I have already exposed many of these to the public gaze, still have some left, and it seems to me a pity that my readers should miss any of the evidence. The first testimonial is from my sister Casey, and a melancholy interest is attached to it. It was the last one she wrote for me before I took the momentous step which will be described in my last chapter:

"Marge Askinforit has been in my service for eight years. I should not be parting with her but for the fact that I am compelled by reasons of health to leave England. Askinforit is clean, sober, honest, an early riser, an excellent plate-cleaner and valet, has perfect manners and high intelligence, takes a great pride in her work, and is most willing, obliging and industrious. She was with me as parlour-maid (first of two), and now seeks temporary employment in that capacity; but there is no branch of domestic service with which she is not thoroughly well acquainted, and when the occasion has arisen she has always been willing to undertake any duties, and has done so with unfailing success. She is tall, of

good appearance, Church of England (or anything else that is required), and anybody who secures such a treasure will be exceptionally fortunate. I shall be pleased at any time to give any further information that may be desired.

(Mrs.) C. MORGENSTEIN."

I do not say that dear Casey's estimate had the arid accuracy of the pedant, but she had a rich and helpful imagination. In rare moments of depression and unhappiness I have found that by reading one of her testimonials I can always recover my tone. And they were effective for their purpose. By this time I was accepting no situations except with titled people; and some of the language that I heard used suggested to me that the reclamation of baronets during their dinner-hour might after all be my life's work.

The next exhibit will be a letter from a famous author, a complete stranger to me, whose work I had long known and admired:

"Dear Madam, For a long time past it has been my privilege to express in the daily newspapers my keen and heartfelt appreciation of a certain departmental store. I thought that I knew my work. I believe even that it gave satisfaction. I could begin an article with fragments of moral philosophy, easily intelligible and certain of general acceptance, modulate with consummate skill into the key of *crêpe de chine*, and with a further natural and easy transition reach the grand theme of the glorious opportunities

offered by a philanthropical Oxford Street to a gasping and excited public. Or I would adopt with grace and facility the attitude of a prejudiced and hostile critic, show how cold facts and indisputable figures reversed my judgment, and end with a life-like picture of myself heading frantically in a No. 16 'bus for the bargain basement, haunted by the terror that I might be too late. With what dignity—even majesty—did I not invest an ordinary transaction in *lingerie*, when I spoke of 'the policy of this great House'! Yes, I believed I knew what there was to know of the supreme art of writing an advertisement.

"But now the mists roll away and I see as it were remote peaks of delicate and implicating advertising the existence of which I had never suspected. It is to you I owe it. You have a theme that you probably find inexhaustible. Fired by your example I shall turn to my own subject (Government linen at the moment) with a happy consciousness that I shall do a far, far better thing than I have ever done before.

Your obedient servant,

CALLISTHENIDES."

Of this letter I will only say that few have the courage and candour to acknowledge an inferiority and an indebtedness, and fewer still could have done it in the viscious and even succulent style of the above. It is a letter that I read often and value highly. The only trouble about it is that I sometimes

wonder if it was not really intended for another lady whose name has one or two points of similarity with my own.

I cannot refrain from quoting also one of the many letters that I received from my dear old friend, Mr. J. A. Bunting:

"And now I must turn to your request for a statement of my opinion of you, to be published in case an autobiography should set in. It was I who introduced you to a certain circle. That circle, though to me an open sessimy, was no doubt particular, and I confess that I felt some hesitation. Through no fault of your own, you were at that time in a position which was hardly up to our level. But I admired your spirit and thought your manners, of which I can claim to be a good judge, had the correct cashy, though with rather too much tendency to back-chat. At any rate, I took the step, and I have never regretted it. You soon made your way to the front, and it is my firm belief that if you had been dropped into a den of raging lions you would have done the same thing. You are much missed. You have my full permission to make what use you please of this testimonial, which is quite unsolicited, and actuated solely by an appreciation of the goods supplied.

"Society in London is very so-so at present, and we leave for Scotland at the end of the week. His lordship's had one fit of his tantrums, but I had a look in my eye that ipsum factum soon put an end to it. I wish

it was as easy to put a stop to his leaning to third-class company. Three ordinary M.P.'s at dinner last night and one R.A. I always did hate riff-raff, and should say it was in my blood."

Unfortunately, it is not everybody who will put into writing, with the simple manliness of Mr. Bunting, the very high opinion of me which they must inevitably have formed. Even George Leghorn has proved a disappointment. But in his case I am inclined to think there was a misunderstanding.

I asked him to send his opinion of me as I thought of making a book. He replied on a postcard: "Don't approve of women in the profession, and you'd better cut it out. It's hard enough for a man bookmaker to scrape a living, with everybody expecting the absurd prices quoted in the press."

Many of the contemporary testimonials that I have received are so cautiously framed and so wanting in warmth that I decline to make any use of them. I have always hated cowardice. I have the courage of my opinions. Why cannot others have the same.

However, I have through my sister Chlorine succeeded in securing the opinions of some of the greatest in another century. I can only say that they confirm my belief in her powers as a medium, and in her wonderful system of wireless telephony.

The first person that I asked her to ring up was Napoleon. She had some difficulty in getting through. He spoke as follows:

"Yes, I am Napoleon. Oh, that's you, Chlorine, is it? . . . . . Quite well, thank you, but find the heat rather oppressive. . . . . You want my opinion of your sister Marge? She is wonderful—wonderful! Tell her from me that if I had but married her when I was a young man, I am confident that Wellington would have met his Waterloo."

I think he would have liked to say more, but unfortunately the receiver fused. I think it showed such nice feeling in him that he spoke English. Poor Chlorine knows no French.

After the apparatus had been repaired, Chlorine got into communication with Sir Joshua Reynolds. She said that his voice had a fruity ceremoniousness, and I wish I could have heard it. But I have not Chlorine's gift of mediumship. Sir Joshua said:

"The more I see of your sister Marge, the more I regret the time that I spent on Mrs. Siddons, who was also theatrical; my compliment that I should go down to posterity on the hem of her garment was not ill-turned, but she is more likely to go down to posterity as the subject of my art. Why, even Romney would have been good enough for her. Could I but have painted Marge, my fame had been indeed immortal. Who's President? . . . Well, you surprise me."

To prevent any possibility of incredulity, I may add that I wrote those words down at the time, added the date and address, and

signed them; so there can be no mistake.

But far more interesting is the important and exclusive communication which Chlorine next received. It was only after much persuasion that I got her to ring him up; she said it was contrary to etiquette. However, she at last put through a call to Sir Herbert Taylor, who kindly arranged the matter for us.

He—not Sir Herbert—showed the greatest readiness to converse. Chlorine says that he spoke in a quick staccato. He was certainly voluble, and this is what he said:

"What, what, what? Want my opinion of marriage, do you, Miss Forget-your-name? I had a long experience of it. Estimable woman, Charlotte, very estimable, and made a good mother, though she showed partiality. If I'd had my own way though—between ourselves, what, what?—I should have preferred Sarah. More lively, more entertaining. Holland would have been pleased. But it couldn't be done. Monarchs are the servants of ministers now. Never admitted that doctrine myself. Kicked against it all my life. Ah, if North had been the strong man I was! But as to marriage . . .

"What, what? You said 'Marge'—not 'marriage'—your sister Marge? You should speak more clearly. Get nearer the receiver—age plays havoc with the hearing. Fine woman, Marge, and you can tell her I said so. Great spirit. Plenty of courage. Always admired courage. If I were a young man

and back on earth again, I might do worse, what, what ? "

And then I am sorry to say he changed the subject abruptly. He went on :

" What's this about King Edward potatoes ? Stuff and nonsense ! I knew all about potatoes. Grew them at Windsor. Kew too. Wrote an article about them. Why can't they name a potato after me ? What ? "

Here Chlorine interposed : " Do you wish for another three minutes, sir, or have you finished ? "

I hoped he would say, " Don't cut us off," but, possibly from habits of economy, he did not. I have not given his name, for fear of being thought indiscreet, but possibly those who are deeply read in history may guess it.

It is the greatest tribute but one that I have ever received, and I think brings me very nearly up to the level of my Great Example. If I could only feel that for once I had done that, I could fold my little hands and be content.

But it is not quite the greatest tribute of all. The greatest is my own self-estimate of me myself. It demands and shall receive a chapter all to itself. Wipe your feet, take off your hat, assume a Sunday expression, and enter upon it reverently.

After all, the gift of seeing ourselves as others see us is not to be desired. In your case for certain it would cause you the most intense depression. Even in my own case I doubt if it would give me the same warm,

pervading glow of satisfaction that obtain from a more Narcissan procedure.

By the way, ought one to say "self-estimate" or "self-esteem"? What a silly girl I am! I quite forgot.

Seventh Extract

SELF-ESTIMATE

More trouble. Determined to give an estimate of myself based on the best models, I turned to the pages of my Great Example, and ran into the following sentence:

"I do not propose to treat myself like Mr. Bernard Shaw in this account."

Does this mean that she does not propose to treat herself as if she were Mr. Bernard Shaw? It might. Does it mean that she does not propose to treat herself as Mr. Bernard Shaw treats her? It is not impossible.

What one wants it to mean is: "I do not propose to treat myself as Mr. Bernard Shaw treats himself." But if she had meant that, she would have said it.

I backed away cautiously, and, a few lines further on, fell over her statement that she has a conception of beauty "not merely in poetry, music, art and nature, but in human beings." No doubt. And I have a conception of slovenly writing not merely in her autobiography, but in its seventeenth chapter.

I had not gone very much further in that same chapter before I was caught in the following thicket:

"I have got china, books, whips, knives, matchboxes, and clocks given me since I was a small child."

If these things were given her since she was a small child, they might have been given her on the day she wrote—in which case it would not have been remarkable that she still possessed them. The nearest way out of the jungle would be to substitute "when" for "since." But it is incredible that she should have thought of two ways of saying the same thing, let them run into one another, and sent "The Sunday Times" the mess resulting from the collision.

She must be right. Mr. Balfour said she was the best letter-writer he knew. With generous reciprocity she read Mr. Balfour's books and realized without external help "what a beautiful style he wrote."

And for goodness sake don't ask me how you write a style. You do it in precisely the same way that you cook a saucepan—that is, by the omission of the word "in."

Yet one more quotation from the last column of the last extract:

"If I had to confess and expose one opinion of myself which might differentiate me a little from other people, I should say it was my power of love coupled with my power of criticism."

No, never mind. The power of love is not an opinion; and in ending a sentence it is just as well to remember how you began it. But I absolutely refuse to let my simple faith be shaken. She records the bones that she has broken, but John Addington Symonds told her that she retained "*l'oreille juste.*"

Her husband said she wrote well, and he must know. Besides, am I to be convinced in my penultimate chapter that anything can be wrong with the model I have followed? Certainly not. It would be heartbreaking.

Besides, the explanation is quite simple. When she wrote that last instalment in "The Sunday Times," the power of criticism had gone to have the valves ground in.

I will now ask your kind attention for my estimate of me, Marge Askinforit, by myself.

There is just one quality which I claim to have in an even greater degree than my prototype. She is unlike real life—no woman was ever like what any woman supposes herself to be—but I am far more unlike real life. I have more inconsistency, more self-contradiction, more anachronism, more impossibility. In fact, I sometimes feel as if some fool of a man were just making me up as he went along.

And the next article? Yes, my imagination.

I have imagination of a certain kind. It has nothing to do with invention or fancy. It is not a mental faculty at all. It is not physical. Neither is it paralysis, butterscotch, or three spades re-doubled. I should so much like to give some idea of it if I had any. Perhaps an instance will help.

I remember that I once said to the Dean of Belial that I thought the naming of a High-

land hotel "The Light Brigade" showed a high degree of imagination.

"Half a moment," said the Dean. "I think I know that one. No—can't get it. Why was the hotel called that?"

"Because of its terrific charges."

"Yes," he said wearily. "I've heard it. But"—more brightly—"can you tell me why a Highland regiment was called 'The Black Watch'?"

"I can, Massa Johnson. Because there's a 'b' in both."

"Wrong again. It's because there's an 'e' in each."

I gave him a half-nelson to the jaw and killed him, and the entire company then sung "Way down upon de Swannee Ribber," with harmonium accompaniment, thus bringing the afternoon performance to a close. The front seats were half empty, but then it was late in the season, and looked like rain, and—

Certainly, I can stop if you like. But you do see what I mean, don't you? The imagination is something that runs away with you. If I were to let mine get away with me, it would knock this old autobiography all to splinters.

But I do not appear to have the kind of imagination that makes me know what will hurt people's feelings. If I love people I always tell them what their worst faults are, and repeat what everybody says about them behind their back. That ought to make people say: "Thank you, Marge, for your

kind words. They will help me to improve myself." It has not happened yet. It is my miraculous power of criticism that causes the trouble. Whenever I let it off the lead it seems to bite somebody; a muzzle has been suggested.

The other day I said to Popsie Bantam: "You're quite right to bob your hair, Popsie. When you have not got enough of anything, always try to persuade people that you want less. But your rouge-et-noir make-up is right off the map. If you could manage to get some of the colours in some of the right places, people would laugh less. And I can never quite decide whether it's your clothes that are all wrong, or if it's just your figure. I wish you'd tell me. Anyhow, you should try for a job at a photographer's—you're just the girl for a dark-room."

Really, that's all I said—just affectionate, lambent, helpful criticism, with a little Tarragon in it. Yet next day when I met her on the staircase she said she didn't want to talk to me any more. So I heaved her over the balustrade and she had a forty-foot drop on to the marble below. I am too impulsive—I have always said so. Rather a pathetic touch was that she died just as the ambulance reached the hospital. I have lost quite a lot of nice friends in this way.

With the exception of a few teeny-weeny murders, I do not think I have done anything in my life that I regret. And even the murders—such as they were—were more the

fault of my circumstances than of myself. If, as I have always wished, I had lived alone on a desert island, I should never have killed anybody at all. But when you go into the great world (basement entrance) and have a bad night, or the flies are troublesome, you do get a feeling of passionate economy; you realize that there are people you can do without, and you do without them. This is the whole truth about a little failing of which my detractors have made the most. Calumny and exaggeration have been carried to such an extent that more than once I have been accused of being habitually irritable.

My revered model wrote that she had always been a collector "of letters, old photographs of the family, famous people and odds and ends." I have not gone quite as far as this.

I have collected odds, and almost every autumn I roam over the moors and fill a large basket with them, but I have never collected ends.

I do want to collect famous people, but for want of a little education I have not been able to do it. I simply do not know whether it is best to keep them in spirits of wine, or to have them stuffed in glass cases—like the canaries and the fish that you could not otherwise believe in. I have been told that really the best way is to press them between the leaves of some very heavy book, such as an autobiography, but I fancy they lose much of their natural brilliance when treated in this way.

Another difficulty is that the ordinary cyanide bottles that you buy at the naturalist's, though excellent for moths, are not really large enough to hold a full-sized celebrity. At the risk of being called a sentimentalist, I may say that I do not think I could kill famous people by any method that was not both quick and painless. If anything like cruelty were involved in their destruction, I would sooner not collect them at all, but just make a study of them in their wild state.

I am only a poor little girl, and I can find nothing whatever on the subject in any reference book in the public reading-room. I need expert advice. There is quite a nice collection of famous—and infamous—people near Baker Street Station, but I am told these are only simulacra. That would not suit me at all. I am far too genuine, downright, and truthful to put up with anything less than the real thing.

There must be some way of doing it. I should like to have a stuffed M.P. in a glass case at each end of the mantelpiece in my little boudoir. They need not be of the rarest and most expensive kinds. A pretty Labour Member with his mouth open and a rustic background, and a Coalitionist lightly poised on the fence, would please me.

It would be so interesting to display one's treasures when people came to tea.

"Never seen a real leader-writer?" I should say. "They're plentiful locally, but mostly come out at night. and so many people

miss them. It is not of the least use to put treacle on the trees. The best way is to drive a taxi slowly down Fleet Street about one in the morning and look honest. That's how I got the big leader-writer in the hall. Just press his top waistcoat button and he'll prove that the lost election was a moral victory.

"In the next case? Oh, they're just a couple of little Georgian poets. They look wild, but they're quite tame really. Sprinkle an advance on account of royalties on the window-sill and they'll come for it. It used to be pretty to watch those two, pouring adulatory articles over each other. They sing chopped prose, and it seemed almost a pity to kill them; but there are plenty more.

"And that very pretty creature is an actress; if you drop an interviewer into the left hand corner of the dressing-room you will hear her say: 'I love a country life, and am never happier than when I am working in my little garden,'—insert here the photograph in the sun-bonnet—'I don't think the great public often realizes what a vast amount of——'"

But I am talking about collecting other people. I am wandering from my subject. I must collect myself.

At a very early age I caught the measles and a little later on the public eye. The latter I still hold. But I do not often lose anything except friends, and occasionally the last 'bus, and of course my situations. My

great model says it is a positive punishment to her to be in one position for long at a time, and I must be something like that—I rarely keep a place much longer than a month. On the other hand, I still have quite a number of metal discs that formed the wheels of a toy railway train which I had when I was quite a child. I should have had them all, but I used some to get chocolates out of the automatic machines.

I should have liked to have appended here a list of my accomplishments, but I must positively keep room for my last chapter. So to save space I will merely give a list of the accomplishments which I have not got, or have not got to perfection.

The E flat clarionet is not really my instrument, but I will give you three guesses what is.

I skate beautifully, but not so well as I dance. However, I am saving the I's out of my autobiography for further practice.

Some people perhaps have better memories. But that's no reason why they should write to the "Sunday Times" about it.

I cannot write Chinese as fluently as English, though I might conceivably write it more correctly.

I think I have mentioned everything in which I am not perfectly accomplished. Truth and modesty make me do it.

I would conclude this estimate of myself as follows. If I had to confess and expose one opinion of myself which would record what I

believe to be my differentiation from other people, it would be the opinion that I am a law unto myself and a judgment to everybody else.

Late Extra

TRAGIC DISAPPEARANCE OF MARGE ASKINFORIT

I sometimes think that it must have been a sense of impending autobiography which made me seek employment in the Lightning Laundry. After all, the autobiographist merely does in public what the laundry does in the decent seclusion of its works at Wandsworth or Balham.

The principal difference would appear to be that a respectable laundress does know where to draw the line.

But I admit that I had other motives in seeking a new career. My attempt to reclaim baronets in their dinner-hour had broken down completely; in spite of everything I could do, the dirty dogs would persist in eating their dinner at that time. Then again, the beautiful and imaginative essays which dear Casey wrote, under different names and with varying addresses, on my suitability for domestic service, had begun to attract too much attention; and a censorious world stigmatized as false and dishonest what was really poetical. I wanted too, a position of greater independence.

Of course, I had to learn the work. At first I was taught the leading principles of

button-removal. Then I went on to the rough-edging. This consists in putting a rough edge on starched collars and cuffs with a coarse file. Afterwards I was promoted to the mixing department. This is where the completed articles are packed for delivery. It requires great quickness and a nice sense of humour. For instance, you take up a pair of socks and have to decide instantly whether you will send them both to an elderly unmarried lady, or divide them impartially between two men. Our skill in creating odd socks and stockings was gratefully recognized by the Amalgamated Hosiers' Institution, who paid the laundry an annual subsidy. A good memory was essential for the work. Every girl was required to memorize what size in collars each male client took, so that the fifteen-inch collars might be sent to the man with the seventeen-inch neck and vice-versa. As the manager said to me once: "What we are here for is to teach people self-control. The rest is merely incidental."

I did not remain very long in the mixing department. My head for figures soon earned me a place in the office. Much of it was routine work. Four times every year we had to send out the notices that owing to the increased cost of labour and materials we were reluctantly compelled to increase our prices 22½ per cent. We made it 22½ per cent. with the happy certainty that very few of our customers would be able to calculate the amount of the increase, and still fewer would

take the trouble; this left a little room for the play of our fancy. As one of our directors—a man with a fine, scholarly head—once said to me: "Bring the larger vision into the addition of a customer's account. The only natural limit to the charge for washing a garment is the cost of the garment. Keep your eyes ever on the goal. Our present prices are but milestones on the road." He had a beautiful, ecclesiastical voice. Nobody would have guessed that he was an engineer and the inventor of the Button-pulper and Hem-render which have done so much to make our laundries what they are.

From the very first day that I took up my work in the office I became conscious that Hector, the manager, had his eye upon me. He would generally read a page or two of Keats or Shelley to us girls, before we began to make out the customers' accounts. This was all in accord with the far-seeing and generous policy of the laundry. The reading took a little time, but it filled us with the soaring spirit. It made pedantic precision and things-that-are repulsive to us. After I heard Hector read the "Ode to a Nightingale" I could not bring myself to say that two and two were four; nothing less than fourteen seemed to give me any satisfaction. Hector knew how quickly responsive and keenly sentient I was. A friend once told me that he had said of me that I made arithmetic a rhapsody. "This," I replied quietly, "means business."

It did. One Saturday afternoon I had tea with him—not on the Terrace, as the A.B.C. shop in the High Street was so much nearer. He was very wonderful. He talked continuously for two hours, and would have gone on longer. But the waitress pointed out that the charge for a cup of tea and a scone did not include a twenty-one years' lease of the chair you sat on.

He was, of course, a man of great scientific attainments. His work on the use of acids in fabric-disintegration has a reputation throughout the laundries of Europe. But he had not the habit of screaming blasphemies which my Great Example failed to convince anybody that she had discovered in Huxley. In brief, he did not conform to the unscientific idea of what a scientific man must be like. He was a cultured idealist. I will try to recall a few of the marvellous things he said that afternoon.

In reply to some remark of mine, he said with authority and conviction: "Marge, you really *are*."

And, indeed, I had to admit that very often I am.

He was saying that in this world gentle methods have effected more than harsh, and added this beautiful thought: "In the ordeal by laundry the soft-fronted often outlasts the starched."

Later, I led him on to speak of ambition.

"I am ambitious. That is to say, I live not in the present, but in the future. At one

time I had a bicycle, but in imagination I drove a second-hand Ford ; and now I possess the Ford, and in imagination I have a Rolls-Royce. I once held a subordinate position in the laundry, but in imagination I was the manager ; and now I am the manager, and in imagination am asked to join the Board of Directors. As the poet Longfellow so wisely said—Excelsior. Engraved in letters of gold on the heart of the ambitious are these words : 'And the next article ?' At this present moment I am having a cup of tea with by far the most brilliant and beautiful girl of my acquaintance, but in imagination—— "

And it was just there that the tactless waitress interrupted us so rudely. It was in vain that I tried to lead him back to the subject. Almost his last words to me that afternoon were :

" I suppose you don't happen to know what the time is ? "

Nor did I. It was just an instance of his subtle intuition. He understood me at once and without effort. Many men have made a hobby of it for years and never been within three streets of it.

The clock at the post-office gave him the information he required, and, raising his hat, he said : " Well, I must be getting on."

The whole of the man's life was in that sentence. Always, he was getting on—and always with a compulsion, as of destiny, shoving behind.

Knowing my keen appreciation of art, of

which I have always been a just and unfailing critic, he took me on the following Saturday to see the pictures. It was not a good show—too many comics for my taste, and I'd seen the Charlie Chaplin one before. However, in the dim seclusion of the two-shilling seats just as the eighteenth episode of "The Woman Vampire" reached its most pathetic passage, and the girl at the piano appropriately shifted to the harmonium, Hector asked me if I would marry him.

(No, I shan't. I know I'm an autobiographer and that you have paid to come in, but there are limits. You know how shy and retiring I am. No nice girl would tell you what the man said or did on such an occasion, or how she responded. There will be no details. And you ought to be ashamed of yourself.)

But just one of Hector's observations struck me particularly: "You know, Marge, there are not many girls in the laundry I would say as much to."

That statement of preference, admitting me as it were to a small circle of the elect, meant very much to me. I could only reply that there were some men I wouldn't even allow to take me to a cinema. I asked, and was accorded, time for consideration.

I was face to face with the greatest problem of my life. There was, I know, one great drawback to my marriage with Hector. An immense risk was involved. When the end

of this chapter is reached the reader will know what the risk and drawback were.

At the same time, everybody knew well that Hector was marked out for a great position. I had already, with a view to eventualities, had some discussion with one of the Directors, Mr. Cashmere, whom I have already quoted. I was a special favourite of his. But it is quite an ordinary thing in business, of course, for a Director to discuss the internal affairs of the Board with one of the Company's junior clerks.

Mr. Cashmere expressed the highest opinion of Hector, and said he had no doubt that Hector would become a Director, as a result of a complicated situation that had arisen. Two of the Directors, Mr. Serge and Mr. Angora, while remaining on the best possible social terms with the chairman, Sir Charles Cheviot, were bitterly opposed to him on questions of policy. On the other and, though agreed on questions of policy, Mr. Serge and Mr. Angora were bitterly jealous of each other, and a rupture was imminent. Under the circumstances, Mr. Cashmere, while assuring everybody of his whole-hearted support, had a private reservation of judgment to be finally settled by the directional feline saltation

Whichever turn the crisis took, he regarded it as certain that there would be a resignation, and that Hector would get the vacant place.

"Why," I said, "it's rather like the Government of the British Empire."

"Hush!" he said, warningly. "It is exactly like it, but in the interests of the shareholders we do not wish that to be generally known. It would destroy confidence."

I myself felt quite certain that if Hector did become a Director he would very shortly be chairman of the Board. He was a man that naturally took anything there was.

It was in my power to marry a man who would become the chairman of a Laundry Company with seventeen different branches. It was a great position. Had I any right to refuse it? If I did not take it, I felt sure that somebody else would. Was anybody else as good as I was? Truth compelled me to answer in the negative. The voice of conscience said: "Take a good thing when you see it. People have lost fortunes by opening their mouths too wide."

On the other hand there were two considerations of importance. I might possibly receive a better offer. If I had been quite sure that Hector would have taken it nicely, I would have asked him for a three months' option to see if anything better turned up, but I knew that with his sensitive nature he might be offended.

The second consideration was the terrible risk to which I have already referred. Do be patient. You will know all about it when the time comes.

I had to decide one way or the other, and—as the world knows now—I decided in favour

of Hector. And immediately the storm broke.

Every old cat that I knew—and I knew some—began to give me advice. Now, nobody takes advice better than I do, when I am conscious that I need it and am sure that the advice is good. Of this I feel as sure as if such an occasion had ever actually arrived. In an International Sweet-nature Competition I would back myself for money every time.

I was told that in the dignified position which was to be mine I must give up larking about and the use of wicked words when irritated. It seemed to me that if I was to surrender all my accomplishments I might just as well never marry Hector at all. I avoid a certain freedom of speech which my great predecessor uses on a similar occasion.

Dear old Mr. Cashmere found me in almost a bad temper about it, and listened gravely to my complaint. Placing one hand on my shoulder, he said :

"Marge, I have lived long, and in the course of my life I have received much advice. My invariable rule has always been to thank for it, expressing my gratitude with some warmth and every appearance of sincerity. This is all that the adviser requires. It gives him, or her, complete satisfaction. It costs nothing. Afterwards, I proceed precisely as if no advice had been given."

That freak, Millie Wyandotte, sent me a plated toast-rack and a letter from which I extract the following :

" If you were half as extraordinary as you

think you are, this would be a miserable marriage. Anybody who married it would get lost, bewildered, and annoyed, and the hymn for those at sea should be sung at the wedding ceremony. But cheer up, old girl. Really extraordinary people never think it worth while to prove that they are extraordinary, and mostly would resent being told it. You'll do. Psychologies like yours can be had from any respectable dealer at a shilling a dozen, including the box. They wear very well and give satisfaction. Here's luck."

Mr. J. A. Bunting sent me a travelling-clock at one time the property of Lord Baringstoke, and a letter of such fervent piety and tender affection that it is too sacred for me to quote.

Fifty-eight rejected suitors combined to send me a hand-bag of no great intrinsic value. I cannot but think that the principle of syndication is more suited to business than to generosity.

But I will not weary the reader with a list of the numerous and costly gifts that I received. Suffice it to say that one of my brothers, an excellent judge, offered me a fiver for the lot, and said that he expected to lose money by it.

* * * *

Immediately after the wedding ceremony the blow fell. I had foreseen the danger of disaster from the very first, and that disaster

came. I can hardly bring myself to write of it.

I have spoken of my husband as Hector, but his surname was Harris—his mother was one of the Tweeds. Consequently, I had become Mrs. Harris.

The tendency of a Mrs. Harris to become mythical was first noticed by an English writer of some repute in the nineteenth century. I forget his precise name, but believe that it was Thackeray.

It was in the vestry that I seemed to hear the voice of an elderly and gin-bemused female telling me that there was no sich person. I did not cease to exist, but I became aware that I never had, and never could have, existed. I was merely mythical. Gently whispering "The Snark was a Boojum," I faded away.

The last sound I heard was the voice of Hector calling to me:

"Hullo, hullo! Are you there? Harris speaking . . . . Hullo, hullo . . . . Are you there?"

And, as not infrequently happens, there was no answer.

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